

MUSEUM STORIES FOR CHILDREN

Presented by

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FIELD MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Roosevelt Road and Lake Michigan

CHICAGO

THE FIRST CAVE PEOPLE

Long, long ago, before the present kind of man had come upon the earth, there lived in western Europe a most interesting people known as "Mousterians" or "Neanderthalers". Some of their cave dwellings still stand in France.

At that time, France was not the land of sunshine and balmy breezes that it is today. Three times glaciers from the arctic regions to the north had swept down the valleys, killing or driving far to the south the plants and animals that had formerly lived in the pleasant land.

As the glaciers retreated, plants like those of northern Asia appeared on the barren land, and animals having heavy, hairy overcoats and woolly undercoats came into the region. They could stand the bitter cold winds and the moisture-laden air, and live on the scanty plant food. Over the hills and plains roamed the woolly mammoth and his companion the woolly rhinoceros, the wild horse and the reindeer, while in the caves such animals as the cave-bear, the Arctic-fox and the Alpine-wolf had their lairs.

Occasionally, the Neanderthal man battled with a cave-bear for possession of some coveted grotto which offered shelter from rain and snow, and where approaching enemies could be seen as they climbed the steep, difficult face of the cliff. Sometimes, he used the cave only as a temporary shelter or hunting lodge, but more often, as a permanent home.

At best, it was a poor kind of home. The short dry season was followed by a long, wet one when the water seeped through the limestone roof of the cave and ran down the sides. It found its way into the odd crevices which served as storehouses for fuel or dried meat kept for the days when terrible cold and blinding snow made working and hunting in the open impossible.

Inside the cave, the family huddled about a hearth where glowed a small fire. If skins were being dressed the mother squatted at her work nearby. In and near such hearths have been found the bones of mammoths, rhinoceroses, giant-deer, cave-bear and brown-bear. These were all beasts of prey from which the Neanderthal hunters obtained pelts for clothing and perhaps fat for torches to light the caverns. From the great quantity of bones found, the cave-bear must have been the most common food.

Hunting was no easy task for the Neanderthaler. He knew nothing of the use of the bow and arrow. His implements of warfare and the chase were of flaked flint made by striking the flint nodules with hard stone hammers until the desired shape and point had been secured. Some of the points are leaf-like while others are triangular. The edges of the implements were always very sharp, as well as the points. From flint were formed all the tools that pierced, cut, scraped and sawed. It is thought that they also used spherical balls of limestone as bolas, and sling stones of irregular form.

After the animal had been killed, it was cut up where it fell, if too large to carry away, and only the best parts removed. Long, large bones, such as flanks and shoulders, were preserved for the marrow they contained. This was a favorite piece of food. Few ribs or backbones are found in the caves, but many fore-leg and foot-bones of the horse and bison. These are covered with irregular cuts seeming to indicate that they were used as anvils.

Besides the implements of warfare and the chase, they made from flints many hammers, choppers, planing tools, drills and borers. Once in a while, a primitive bone implement is found, but the Neanderthal man made no attempt to develop that kind of implement as did the Cro-Magnons who came after the Neanderthalers and who also lived in caves.

Nor did the two kinds of cave men look at all alike. The Cro-Magnon was very tall and straight, while the first cave man was short and thick-set with head out of all proportion to the small body. The face was very deep with massive ridges above the deep-set eyes. Due to a peculiarity of the backbone he could not have stood up straight even if he so desired. His hand was remarkably large and powerful, well-adapted for the making of his keen flint implements.

MARGARET M. CORNELL, Guide-lecturer

NOTE: How he looked and the kind of home he had may be seen by paying a visit to the cave in Ernest R. Graham Hall on the second floor. This shows a complete family group.

The open hours are as follows:

November, December, January	-	-	9 A. M. to 4:30 P. M.
February, March, April, October	-	-	9 A. M. to 5 P. M.
May, June, July, August, September	-	-	9 A. M. to 6 P. M.

Field Museum is free to children at all times.

It is free to adults on Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

STEPHEN C. SIMMS, Director